

DA'WAH

TO

HINDUS

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Hinduism is a religion that originated in India and is still practiced there, as well as in those countries within the Indian cultural sphere (chiefly South East Asia) and those with resident communities of Indian stock (chiefly South East Asia, East Africa, South Africa, and Britain). The word Hindu is derived from the Sanskrit word *sindhu* ("river", more specifically, the Indus); the Persians in the 5th century BC called the Hindus by that name, identifying them as the people of the land of the Indus. The Hindus' own definitions of their community are *Sanatana Dharam* "old tradition" or *Vedantic Dharam* "those who believe in the Vedas" or "those who follow the way (dharma) of the four classes or castes (*varnas*) and stages of life (*ashramas*)".

Fundamental Principles

Among Hindus, there is far more uniformity in ritual than in belief is found, although all share very few practices or beliefs. Many Hindus worship Shiva, Vishnu, or the Goddess (Devi), but they also worship hundreds of additional minor deities peculiar to a particular village or even to a particular family.

No doctrinal or ecclesiastical hierarchy exists in Hinduism, but the intricate hierarchy of the social system (which is inseparable from the religion gives each person a sense of place within the whole.

The Scriptures

There are several sacred scriptures of the Hindus. Among these are the four Vedas (Rig, Sam, Yajar, Atharva) and ten principal Upanishads and eighteen Puranas and two epics called Ramayana and Mahabarata. And the most widely read book among Hindus is Bhagavad – Gita. Bhagavad – Gita is a part of the Mahabarata.

Philosophy

Incorporated in this rich literature is a complex cosmology. Hindus believe that the universe is a great, sphere; a cosmic egg, within which are numerous concentric heavens, hells, oceans, and continents, with India at the center. They believe that time is both degenerative going from the golden age, or Krita Yuga, through two intermediate periods of decreasing goodness, to the present age, or Kali Yuga – and cyclic. At the end of each kali Yuga, the Universe is destroyed by fire and flood, and a new golden age begins, Human life, too, is cyclic, involving transmigration. After death, the soul leaves the body and is reborn in the body of another person, an animal, vegetables, or minerals. This process of endless entanglement in activity and rebirth is called Samsara.

Doctrine of atman-brahman.

Hindus believe in an uncreated, eternal, infinite, transcendent, and all-embracing principle, which, "comprising in itself being and non-being," is the sole reality, the ultimate cause and foundation, source, and goal of all existence. This ultimate

reality is called Brahman. As the all, Brahman causes the universe and all beings to emanate from itself, transforms itself into the universe, or assumes its appearance. Brahman is in all things and is the Self (atman) of all living beings. Brahman is the creator, preserver, or transformer and reabsorber of everything. Although it is Being in itself, without attributes and qualities and hence impersonal, it may also be conceived of as a personal high God, usually as Vishnu or Shiva.

Ahimsa: non-injury

A further characteristic of Hinduism is the ideal of ahimsa. Ahimsa, or the absence of the desire to harm, is regarded by Indian thinkers as one of the keystones of their ethics. Historically, ahimsa is unrelated to vegetarianism; in ancient India, killing people in war or in capital punishment and killing animals in Vedic sacrifices were acceptable to many people who for other reasons refrained from eating meat. However, the two movements, reinforced one another through the common concept of the disinclination to kill and eat animals, and together they contributed to the growing importance of the protection and veneration of the cow, which gives food without having to be killed. Neither ahimsa nor vegetarianism ever found full acceptance. Even today, many Hindus eat beef, and nonviolence has never been a notable characteristic of Hindu behaviour.

Three Margas: Paths To Salvation

Hindus disagree about the way (marga) to final emancipation (moksha). Three paths to salvation are presented in an extremely influential religious text, the Bhagavadgeeta (Song of the Lord; c. 200 BC), according to which it is not the acts themselves but the desire for their results that produces karma and thus attachment. These three ways to salvation are (1) the karma-marga ("the path of duties"), the disinterested discharge of ritual and social obligations; (2) the jnana-marga ("the path of knowledge"), the use of meditative concentration preceded by a long and systematic ethical and contemplative training, yoga, to gain a supra-intellectual insight into one's identity with Brahman; and (3) the bhakti-marga ("the path of devotion"), the devotion to a personal God.

Although the search for moksha has never been the goal of more than a small minority of Hindus, liberation was a religious ideal that affected all lives...

For the ordinary Hindu, the main aim of worldly life lies in conforming to social and ritual duties, to the traditional rules of conduct for one's caste, family, and profession. Such requirements constitute an individual's dharma (law and duties), one's own part of the broader stability, law, order and fundamental equilibrium in the cosmos, nature, and society. Sanaatana (traditional) dharma – a term used by Hindus to denote their own religion – is a close approximation to "religious practices" in the West. (p. 521)¹

¹ According to Hindu monist philosophers, humankind's purpose is the realization of their divinity and - following a path (*marga*) to emancipation (*moksha*) from the wheel of rebirth - the reabsorption of the human soul (*atman*) into the ultimate reality, *Brahman*. For those following the *bhakti* path, the purpose is to love God because God created humankind to "enjoy a relationship - as a father enjoys his

Ashramas: the four stages of life

Nearly 2,000 years ago, the *Upanishads* elaborated the social doctrine of the four *ashramas* (stages of life). This concept is an attempt at harmonizing the conflicting tendencies of Hinduism into one system. It held that a member of the three higher classes should first become a chaste student (*brahmachari*); then become a married householder (*grihastha*), discharging his debts to his ancestors by begetting sons and to the gods by sacrificing; then retire as a *vanaprastha*, without his wife, to the forest to devote himself to spiritual contemplation; finally, become a homeless wandering ascetic (*sannyasin*). The situation of the forest dweller was always a delicate compromise that remained problematic. And was often omitted or rejected in practical life.

Caste System

The religious sanction and framework given to the caste system in India have made it a particularly powerful social tool – a rebellion against caste becomes a rebellion against religion, with consequences in this and future lives – and has been a factor in its remarkable endurance to this day. The caste system appears to have evolved some time after the arrival into northern India of the Indo-European tribes known as the Aryans, a nomadic people, around 1500 BC, after the collapse of the Indus Valley civilization.

The Hindu scriptures teach that there are many gods, incarnations of gods, persons of God and that everything is God, Brahman. In spite of the belief that the self (atman) of all living beings is actually Brahman, an oppressive caste system evolved in which the Brahmins, the priestly caste, possess spiritual supremacy by birth. They are the teachers of the Vedas² and represent the ideal of ritual purity and social prestige. On the other hand, the Sudra caste are excluded from religious status and their sole duty in life is “to serve meekly”³ the other three castes and their thousands of subcastes.

Varnas

The Aryans divided human society into four groups (varna, the Sanskrit word for color). The four varnas, in descending order of status, are the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (the kings and warriors), the Vaishyas (the farmers and merchants), and the Shudras (servants).

children”(Srimad Bhagwatam). For the ordinary Hindu, the main aim of worldly life lies in conforming to social and ritual duties, to the traditional rules of conduct for one’s caste - the *karma* path.

² The *Veda*, meaning “Knowledge”, is a collective term for revealed (*sruti*; heard) sacred scriptures of the Hindus. All other works - in which the actual doctrines and practises of Hindus are encoded - are recognized as having being composed by human authors and are thus classed as *smriti* (remembered). (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol.20, p.530).

³ *Manava Dharmasastra* 1.91 (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol.20, p.553).

Those who performed the most menial tasks, such as the sweepers, and those who collected waste, were left out of the caste system altogether, becoming outcastes or *Chandalas*.

GODS AND GOD-MEN

Trimurti

(Sanskrit: “Three Forms”), in Hinduism, a triad of the three great gods, *Brahmā*, *Vishnu*, and *Śiva* (*Shiva*). Scholars consider the *Trimurti* doctrine as an attempt to reconcile different monotheistic approaches with one another and with the philosophic doctrine of ultimate reality (*Brahman*). Although sometimes called the Hindu Trinity, Trimurti has little similarity to the Christian Trinity. The doctrine was given classical expression in Kālidāsa's poem Kumārasambhava (c. 4th–5th century).

Rama

One of the most widely worshipped Hindu deities, the embodiment of chivalry and virtue. Although there are three *Rāmas* mentioned in Indian tradition (*Paraśurāma*, *Balarāma*, and *Rāmacandra*), the name is specifically associated with *Rāmacandra*, the seventh incarnation (*avatāra*) of Lord Vishnu. It is possible that Rāma was an actual historical figure, a tribal hero of ancient India who was later deified. His story is told briefly in the *Mahābhārata* (“Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty”) and at great length in the *Rāmāyana* (q.v.; “Romance of Rāma”).

References to Rāma as an incarnation of Vishnu appear in the early centuries AD; there was, however, probably no special worship of him before the 11th century, and it was not until the 14th and 15th centuries that distinct sects appeared venerating him as the supreme god. Rāma's popularity was increased greatly by the retelling of the Sanskrit epics in the vernaculars, such as *Tulsīdās'* celebrated Hindi version, the *Rāmcaritmānas* (“Sacred Lake of the Acts of Rāma”).

Hanuman

In Hindu mythology, the divine monkey chief, a central figure in the great Hindu epic the *Rāmāyana* (“Romance of Rāma”). Hanumān is the child of a nymph by the wind god; accompanied by a host of monkeys, he aided Rāma in recovering his wife, Sītā, from the demon Rāvana. His heroic exploits are many. He acted as Rāma's spy in the midst of the demon's kingdom; when he was discovered and his tail set on fire; he burnt down their city, Lankā. Hanumān flew to the Himalayas and carried back the mountain of medicinal herbs to restore the wounded among Rāma's army. He crossed the strait between India and Sri Lanka in one leap.

A beneficent guardian spirit, he is worshiped in the form of a monkey with a red face, who stands erect like a human. Temples in his honor are numerous. In his devotion to Rāma, Hanumān is upheld as a model for human devotion to

god, an attitude depicted by South Indian bronze sculptors. He is also a popular deity in Japan, where many temples are erected to his honor and districts of towns bear his name. The hanuman monkey (*Presbytis entellus*), one of the most common Indian monkeys, is named after the god and is thus generally looked upon as sacred.

Ganesha

Also spelled Ganesh, also called *Ganapati* is the elephant-headed Hindu god, who is the son of Lord Shiva and his wife, *Parvati*. He is also revered by Jains and important in the art, myth, and ritual of Buddhist Asia.

One account of his birth is that Parvati formed him from the rubbings of her body so that he might stand guard at the door while she bathed. When Shiva approached (unaware that this was Parvati's son), he was enraged at being kept away from his wife and set his attendants against Ganesha, whose head was cut off in the battle. To ease Parvati's grief, Shiva promised to cut off the head of the first creature that he came across and join it to the body. This was a baby elephant.

Krishna

Sanskrit *Kṛṣṇa* one of the most widely revered and most popular of all Indian divinities, worshipped as the eighth incarnation (*avatar*, or *avatāra*) of the Hindu god Vishnu and also as a supreme god in his own right. Krishna became the focus of numerous *bhakti* (devotional) cults, which over the centuries have produced a wealth of religious poetry, music, and painting. The basic sources of Krishna's mythology are the epic *Mahābhārata* and its 5th-century-AD appendix, the *Harivaṃśa*, and the *Purāṇas*, particularly Books 10 and 11 of the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*.

Avatara

Sanskrit *Avatāra* ("descent"), in Hinduism is the incarnation of a deity in human or animal form to counteract some particular evil in the world. The term usually refers to these 10 appearances of Vishnu: *Matsya* (fish), *Kūrma* (tortoise), *Varāha* (boar), *Narasimha* (half man, half lion), *Vāmana* (dwarf), *Paraśurāma* (Rāma with the axe), *Rāma* (hero of the Rāmāyana epic), *Krishna* (the divine cowherd), *Buddha*, and *Kalkin* (the incarnation yet to come). The number of Vishnu's *avatars* is sometimes extended or their identities changed, according to local preferences. Thus, Krishna is in some areas elevated to the rank of a deity, and his half brother, *Balarāma*, included as an *avatar*. One formulation of the doctrine is given in the religious poem the *Bhagavadgītā*, when charioteer Lord Krishna tells Arjuna: "Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness then I send forth myself for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness. I come into being from age to age."

New Gods Every Day

"The adaptability of Hinduism to changing conditions is illustrated by the appearance in the Hindu pantheon of a new divinity, of special utility in an acquisitive society. This is the goddess Santosee Maataa, first worshipped widely by women in many cities of Uttar Pradesh and now worshipped throughout India, largely as the result of a popular mythological film about her birth and the origin of her worship. The new goddess was unheard-of a few years ago and has no basis in any Puraanic myth. Propitiated by comparatively simple and inexpensive rites performed in the home without the intervention of a priest, Santosee, it is believe, grants practical and obvious blessings, such as a promotion for a needy, overworked husband, a new radio, or even a refrigerator." (p. 529)

Worship and Ritual (Puja)

In daily ritual, a Hindu (generally the wife, who is thought to have more power to intercede with the gods) makes offerings (*puja*) of fruit or flowers before a small shrine in the house. Many villages, and all sizeable towns, have temples, where priests perform ceremonies throughout the day: sunrise prayers and noises to awaken the god within the holy of holies (the *garbagriha*, or "womb-house"); bathing, clothing, and fanning the god; feeding the god and distributing the remains of the food (*prasada*) to worshipers.

Virtually all rituals in Hinduism possess multiple meanings, including symbolic interpretations. Even the way Hindus regularly greet each other may be regarded as hands together, which symbolizes the meeting of two people; placing the hands over the heart where *Brahman* dwells, indicating that one meets the self in the other; bowing the head in recognition of this meeting; and saying *namaste*, a Sanskrit word that means "I bow to you" and signifies "I bow to the divine in you."

Puja. Hindu worship (*puja*) consists essentially of an invocation, a reception, and the entertainment of God as a royal guest. It normally consists of 16 "attendances" (*upacaara*): invocation by which the omnipresent God is invited to direct his attention to the particular worship; the offering of a seat, water (for washing the feet, for washing the hands, and for rinsing the mouth), a bath, a garment, a sacred thread, perfumes, flowers, incense, a lamp, food and homage; and a circumambulation of the image and dismissal by God." (p. 550)

"In the temple the god was worshipped by the rites of *puja* (reverencing a sacred being or object) as though the worshippers were serving a great king. In the important temples a large staff of trained officiants waited on the god., He was awakened in the morning along with his goddess, washed, clothed and fed, placed in his shrine to give audience to his subjects, praised and entertained throughout the day, ceremoniously fed, undressed, and put to bed at night. Worshipers sang, burned lamps, waved lights before the divine image, and performed other acts of homage. The god's dancing girls (*devadasis*) performed before him at regular intervals, watched by the officiants and lay worshipers, who were his courtiers. These women, either the daughters of *devadasis* or girls dedicated in childhood, also served as prostitutes. The association of dedicated

prostitutes with certain Hindu shrines can be traced back to before the Christian era. It became more widespread in the post-Gupta times, especially in South India, and aroused the reprobation of 19th –century Europeans. Through the efforts of Hindu reformers the office of the devadasis was discontinued.” (p. 525)

Bindi, the red dot that many Hindu women wear on the forehead, is an auspicious mark and symbol of good fortune. Once worn only by married women, *bindi* can be seen today on girls and women of all ages. Its location, over a *chakra* (energy point), is intended to help focus concentration during meditation.

Lingam (Sanskrit: “sign,” “distinguishing symbol”), in Hinduism, the phallus, symbol of the god Siva, worshipped as an emblem of generative power. The *linga* is the main object of worship in Saivite temples and private family shrines throughout India. Anthropomorphic representations of Siva are less commonly worshipped. The Yoni, which is the symbol of the female sexual organ (and thus of the goddess Parvati consort of Siva), often forms the base of the erect linga; the two together are a reminder to the devotee that the male and female principles are forever inseparable and that together they represent the totality of all existence.

Suttee (Sanskrit *sati*, “true wife”), is a practice that prevailed in India of a widow burning herself on the funeral pyre, either with the body of her husband or, if had died at a distance, separately. Classical authors mention it as early as 316 BC. It appears at first to have been a royal custom and privilege, afterward generalized and made legal. The British abolished the custom in 1829, but isolated instances persisted in remote parts of India until recent times. In theory the act of *suttee* was voluntary, but in earlier orthodox communities any woman who refused to perform it was ostracized.

Prophet Muhammad (...) in Hindu scriptures

*Etha sminnanthare mletcha acharyena samanwitha
Mahamada ithikhyadha shishya shakha samanwitham*
(Bhavishya Purana 3:3:3:5)

“Then a preacher by name Mahammad along with his followers will appear in foreign Island.”

*Ne me viduh sura-ganah prabhavam na maharsayah
Ahamad-ir hi devanam maharsinam ca sarvasah*
(Bhagavad-gita ch.10 ver.2)

“Neither the hosts of demigods nor the great sages know my origen, Ahamad is the name of a man who will demolish demigods and demi-sages.”

GENERAL STEPS FOR DA'WAH TO HINDUS

The following are some of the major issues to discuss, clarifying the Islaamic position:

1. Is God Man and Man God (Atman-Brahman)? The Avatars or incarnations of God blurs the distinction between Creator and creation.

2. Changing Beliefs: Sati (wife dying on the funeral pyre of her husband); Devadasis (god's dancing girls who doubled as temple prostitutes – banned by Europeans in 19th century); vegetarianism not found in early scriptures; the four Ashramas (stages of life) impractical; caste system unjust – True religion from God not changeable as basic principles needed to guide human life unchangeable.

3. Inappropriate Scriptures: Ramayana – Rama, god, cavorting with women, playing tricks by hiding their clothing when he found them swimming. Rama's wife was captured by Rawan, a Demon god, and it took 12 years to get her back. He was helped by Hanuman, the monkey god of power, to building a bridge from India to Sri Lanka of which there is no trace. Ganesh, elephant head god of good luck, son on Shiva, god of destruction and Parvati, Lord Shiva chopped off his head not realizing that it was his son and lost the head, and replaced it with the head of an elephant.

4. Degrading Worship: Lingam Yoni – animals etc.

5. Unfair and Unjust Caste system: Brahmin born teachers of the Vedas, Shudras not allowed even to read the Vedas.

6. Muhammad mentioned in Hindu scriptures.

7. Authors of Hindu Scriptures Unknown.

HINDU TERMINOLOGY

WORD	PRONOUNCIATON	MEANING
Avtar		Incarnation
Ashramas		The four stages of life
Brahmins		Priestly Caste
Brahmachari		Chaste student
Bhagwat-Gita		Hindu Scriptures
Bindi		The red dot on the forehead
Chandalas		Out Caste
Chakra		Energy Point
Dharma		Religion or Duty
Devi		Goddess
Grihasth		Married, House Holder

Garbagriha		Womb-House
Kshatriya		The king and warriors caste
Lingam		Male Sexual Organ
Mahabharata		Hindu Scriptures
Namaste		I bow to you
Puja		Worship and Ritual
Prasada		Distributing
Purans		Hindu Scriptures
Ramayana		Hindu Scriptures
Sindhu		Indus River
Samsara		Process of rebirth
Sanskrit		Ancient Indian Language
Shudras		The Servants Caste
Sannyasin		Forest Dweller
Suttee or Sati		“True Wife”
Trimorti		The Trinity of Hindus
Upnishad		Hindu Scriptures
Varnas		Color, The four classes, caste system
Vanaprasth		Retirement
Vedas		Sacred book of Hindus
Yug		Age
Yoni		Female Sexual Organ